

Two hands are shown, palms facing forward, with vibrant, multi-colored paint splatters in shades of red, yellow, blue, green, and pink. The hands are positioned on either side of the central text and logo.

Our Accomplishments



Office for Young Children

2005 CITY OF HARTFORD 2009

A Message From Hartford Early Childhood Leaders

Long before I was elected Mayor, I became aware of the importance of school success to later life achievements and how relationships with family and others matter. Early childhood opportunities, safe neighborhoods, comprehensive health services, mentors and role models, self-sufficient families and quality educational experiences all reflect my deep commitment to ensuring Hartford's children get the best start in life.

My vision for Hartford is a city where young children are healthy, safe and find success in school and life. This cannot happen without infusing high-quality, family-focused, comprehensive early childhood opportunities throughout all levels of government and community-based service delivery. For children to perform better in school and in life, we can no longer wait until kindergarten to promote their health, safety, and learning.

Unquestionably, there is an economic, moral and social need to do the best and most for our children. Therefore, in 2005 my administration established the Office for Young Children, under the capable leadership of Dr. José Colón-Rivas and his staff to implement Hartford's early childhood initiative. Last March, the National Child Labor Committee recognized José's labor of love to this city by presenting him with its 2008 National Lewis Hine Award "for his outstanding service on behalf of children and youth."

The attached Report highlights in detail the impressive accomplishments the Office for Young Children has achieved throughout its mere four-years of operation on behalf of Hartford's youngest residents that will not only help them become successful students but also productive adults. I am proud to support such a wise investment that ensures quality of life outcomes. For this reason, it is essential to keep health, safety, early childhood education and sound academic choices a priority.



Eddie A. Perez
Mayor

Amidst the national explosion of interest and investment in early care and education, the Office for Young Children (OFYC) is proud to boast the state's first early childhood municipal plan as well as a comprehensive Early Childhood Report and now the release of the city's Early Childhood Accomplishment Report. This Progress Report provides a snapshot and detailed overview of major accomplishments the OFYC has achieved within the first four years of operation.

In a time of fiscal hardships and budget reductions, the Office stands prepared to further its work in order to produce quality of life results and save money in the end. High quality early childhood services are proven to be one of the smartest investments throughout the country matched with sizable funding increases.

The OFYC has risen to the challenge and is well on its way to reaching its charge of coordinating an estimated \$106 million in spending to benefit approximately 300 public and private programs designed to enhance the lives of young children and their families.

In short, the OFYC has radically changed Hartford's early childhood landscape. It has been able to serve more children with increased funding awards while decreasing general fund expenditures; increase the credentials and skills of Hartford's early childhood professionals; promote the public's awareness of the importance of early care and education; consolidate city early childhood structures; create coordinated family support resources; and support the construction of new state-of-the-art early childhood facilities.

On behalf of the OFYC, it is my sincere pleasure to release our report to Hartford.



José F. Colón-Rivas, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Office for Young Children

Our Accomplishments



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Hartford's Blueprint for Young Children

In 2004, Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez asked the Hartford Public Schools, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and the Commission on Children to chart a new course for the City to strengthen early childhood policy and services. The 2005 release of **Hartford's Blueprint for Young Children** unveiled a plan to unite diverse programs and services in the City of Hartford and meld them into a cohesive coordinated, family-centered system that focuses public policy-making and financial investments to improve the lives of young children, ages birth through eight.

Funded by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Blueprint includes a dramatically changed organizational leadership structure. At the center, is Mayor Perez's commitment to young children, including his willingness to lead the initiative through his office with the support of a high-level Cabinet that includes government and business leaders and a fully staffed **Office for Young Children**, thereby elevating the visibility of the issues and needs of young children and their families within the upper echelons of city government.

The Blueprint plan builds upon existing initiatives, expanding them to cover a broader age range, strengthens family support services including a transition to kindergarten component, increases K-3 performance

(literacy, numeracy), and focuses on access to comprehensive preventive health services. The **Mayor's Cabinet for Young Children** and the Office for Young Children assume responsibility for administering the City's school readiness program and continuing its efforts to integrate all activities for children birth through eight years of age and their families. **To date, the Office for Young Children has effectively increased its school readiness funds by 35%, its DSS funds by 14%, and has spearheaded an expansion initiative to serve 638 more preschool children within its initial three-year operating period.**

Specifically, the Office for Young Children leads and drives the City's early childhood initiative. The vision of the Office is that Hartford is a City where young children are healthy, safe and find early success in school and life. That said- the Office for Young Children has the responsibility to plan, innovate, and track approximately \$35 million in annual expenditures that the City and Schools directly dedicate to early care and education. Eventually, it will coordinate an estimated total of \$106 million in spending through approximately 300 programs, both public and private, that affect the lives of young children and their families in the City.

General responsibilities and functions of the Office for Young Children:

- Implement early childhood policy and the Blueprint, thereby coordinating early care and education planning;
- Develop annually with the Office of Management and Budget, a "Children's" Budget;
- Issue a bi-annual "report card" on the status of early childhood;
- Lead and/or participate on boards and commissions related to early childhood; and
- Seek additional revenues.

Presently, there are five task force groups established, each meeting on a regular basis and each correlated to one of the five Blueprint Building Blocks:

1. Newborn Screening & Home Visiting for Families,
2. Neighborhood-Based Family Supports and Development,
3. Childcare and Early Childhood Education,
4. Transition From Preschool to Kindergarten,
5. Universal Access and Use of Primary Health Care.

Building blocks 1 and 5 are facilitated by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Connecticut Charts-A-Course & Capital Community College Scholarship Grants

In 2005, the Office for Young Children reported that only half of the school readiness staff working in preschool classrooms met minimum credential requirements compared to the 74% who are currently teaching in classrooms. Moreover, 88% of all OFYC Early Learning Center classroom staff currently fulfills minimum staff credentials and 68% are enrolled in college courses.

Building a stable, diverse and skilled workforce is essential to ensuring quality outcomes for Hartford early childhood programs. Therefore, it is one of the Office for Young Children's highest rated priorities. The most significant barriers Hartford early childhood professionals often encounter when pursuing college courses is the prohibitive cost of college tuitions and the shortage of bilingual courses. In 2005, the Office collaborated with Capital Community College and received a state grant to cover tuition and textbook costs for over 100 non-degreed Hartford early childhood professionals to attend credit-bearing courses in order to increase their credentials and expertise. Over the course of two years, approximately six courses were offered each semester, including bilingual courses- thereby creating a stronger Hartford early childhood workforce.

For two consecutive years, the Office for Young Children and Capital Community College hosted annual celebrations for all those successfully completing college courses. Mayor Perez and Capital Community College President Dr. Woodland

extended their congratulations and appreciation to students for their hard work and encouraged them to continue forward with their educational careers. At the 2007 event, students provided oral testimonies to the audience describing how the courses changed their attitudes and perspectives and how they became confident they could succeed in future coursework and secure a degree.

Unfortunately, due to limitations imposed by funding sources in the end of 2007, many individuals became ineligible for scholarships forcing the Office for Young Children to enter into a new creative partnership with Capital Community College. As a result, since January 2008, seven college courses have been provided free of charge to early childhood professionals interested in pursuing an Associates Degree. In addition, Capital Community College has allowed Hartford early childhood professionals to enroll in other scheduled courses if the college is not able to fill all of the class spaces. Textbooks that often cost students over \$100 each are purchased by the Office for Young Children to lend to enrolled students and returned to the Office for future student use.





Office for Young Children's Annual Family Fair

"The Family Fair is an important activity for helping parents become aware of programs that are available for their children, and for giving them an opportunity to engage in fun activities together with their kids. In their busy routines, parents often don't have enough time to do this."

*Lisa Feliciano,
Salvation Army*

Within its first year of operation, the Office for Young Children convened its first Family Fair in March 2006. The intent of the Fair was to bring families, particularly those who would otherwise not benefit from such exposure, to City Hall, the Hartford Public Library's main branch office and the Wadsworth Atheneum for fun, engaging activities. While attending the free event, families learned more about the:

- importance of quality early learning experiences
- programs and services available to families with young children
- benefits of registering early for kindergarten

Based on the overwhelming success of this event as measured by the hundreds of families attending and from numerous requests from parents, children, City Council members, the Mayor's Office and other city leaders and professionals, the Office for Young Children has since reconvened the Fair on an annual basis. Each year the entire building of City Hall is transformed overnight into a magical castle filled with balloons, banners, lights and festive activities. Featured activities tailored to families with young children include:

- family entertainment such as jugglers, magicians, face-paintings, stilt walkers, storytellers, clowns, bubble-makers, balloon artists, mural paintings, musical performances, etc.;

- hands-on early learning activities for young children and parents such as arts and crafts activities or story-telling opportunities;
- information booths representing Hartford's early childhood programs, health resources and family support centers;
- interactive workshops offered by Hartford family support centers to recruit interested families;
- engaging activities offered by the Hartford Public Schools to promote kindergarten registration and enrollment;
- special workshops and activities offered by the Hartford Public Library & the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Each year, the Office plans more activities, recruits more collaborative players and gains greater attendance rates. Last year's event drew a record attendance of nearly 1,600 and this year's Fair will expand to incorporate the grounds of the Atheneum, Burr Mall, City Hall and the Hartford Public Library. For each Fair, Hartford restaurants donate food so families are able to benefit from a day of fun and laughter without the worry of monetary expenses.

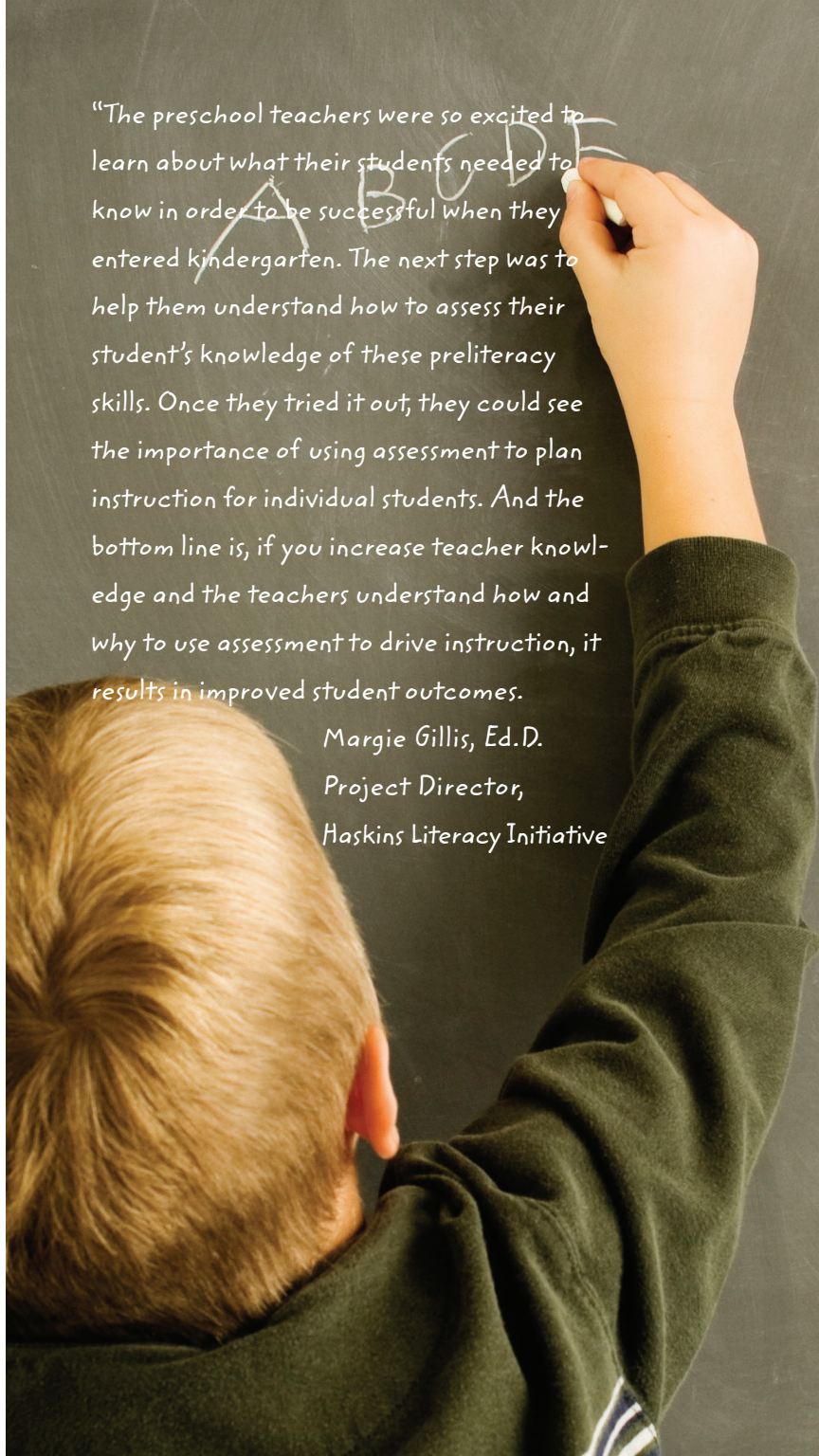
Haskins Literacy Preschool Pilot

With so many Hartford 4th graders reading below grade level and failing in the early grades, the Office for Young Children focuses much of its effort into promoting comprehensive pre-reading instruction prior to kindergarten. For very young children it is as simple as reading books and having many conversations to build vocabulary and comprehension. Children who enter kindergarten without an understanding of phonemic awareness (words broken down into sounds) and a fundamental knowledge of the alphabetic principle (an understanding that language is based on an alphabet where letters represent sounds in words) struggle with school success and often develop subsequent academic failure.

In Connecticut, forecasts for future prison construction are based on Grade 3 reading failure rates. According to the Connecticut Departments of Education and Corrections, it costs more than twice annually to support a prisoner than it does to educate a child. The Office for Young Children led by an administration well versed in school reform, early childhood education and development, educational leadership, scientifically proven and research based practices, and system development is deeply committed to turning the curve of school failure.

"As a result of the Haskins training, I am implementing best practices in my classroom. I have supported my children's oral language and vocabulary by choosing a unit of study such as the weather. The children have the opportunity to use words and concepts that are related to that particular unit throughout the day or week. We talk about these words throughout the week and use art projects or reading time to explore these concepts."

*Lisa Benson, Head Teacher
Salvation Army –The Right Place*

A hand is shown writing the letters A, B, C, D, E in white chalk on a dark chalkboard. The letters are written in a simple, slightly slanted font. The hand is holding a piece of white chalk and is positioned at the end of the letter E. The background of the image is a dark chalkboard, and the hand is wearing a dark green long-sleeved shirt.

"The preschool teachers were so excited to learn about what their students needed to know in order to be successful when they entered kindergarten. The next step was to help them understand how to assess their student's knowledge of these preliteracy skills. Once they tried it out, they could see the importance of using assessment to plan instruction for individual students. And the bottom line is, if you increase teacher knowledge and the teachers understand how and why to use assessment to drive instruction, it results in improved student outcomes."

*Margie Gillis, Ed.D.
Project Director,
Haskins Literacy Initiative*



Furthermore, research confirms that **children from disadvantaged families hear 30 million fewer words spoken by age three compared with children from more affluent backgrounds.** If children have never heard a word, it is very difficult to sound the word out when learning to read. It is therefore critical for early childhood teachers to make up the difference in the number of words children experience early in life. Instructional strategies and methods based on scientific research taught and learned by Hartford teachers improve the likelihood of impressive, long lasting results.

As a support, the Office for Young Children pursued the Haskins Literacy Initiative program, affiliated with Haskins Laboratories, a private non-profit research institute with a primary focus on speech and language and their biological basis. The Haskins Literacy Initiative promotes the science of teaching reading through comprehensive professional development, coaching and classroom support to make teachers "method proof" masters of literacy practices.

"PALS is an effective assessment tool because it helps prepare young children for the expectations they will face upon entering Kindergarten. The Haskins project allowed us to learn how to best utilize this tool with hands on experience and on site support."

Parkville Early Learning Center Staff

For many years, Haskins Literacy Initiative had been actively involved with school districts throughout the state, most notably the Hartford Public Schools. Based on outstanding outcomes, the Office for Young Children engaged Haskins with the prospects of piloting a preschool pilot to promote language and literacy skills in enrolled three and four-year olds. In August

2006, Haskins and the Office for Young Children launched the first **Haskins Preschool Pilot Initiative** to prepare Hartford's preschoolers with knowledge, skills, and experiences so that they will be ready to learn how to read when they enter kindergarten.

Due to the success of this initiative, a second cohort began in 2007. Thanks to this multi-year partnership, hundreds of Hartford preschoolers are having fun while learning reading readiness without knowing that they are learning important precursors to reading success.

Graustein Discovery Initiative: Transition to Kindergarten



"READY..... SET.....LEARN and GROW!!!!
Here at Dwight, we are planting the seeds of
success.."

Stacey McCann, Principal
Dwight Elementary School

The Office for Young Children annually benefits from Graustein Discovery funds to develop a coordinated and uniform citywide transition to kindergarten system. In order to ensure community input, the Office sponsored a series of 12 public forums between April and June 2006 to elicit input from preschool teachers and directors, kindergarten teachers, principals, and parents about ways to improve the kindergarten transition process for Hartford children. Enhancing the transition to kindergarten is one of the five building blocks in the Hartford Blueprint for Young Children. Approximately 120 people participated in the sessions.

Participants agreed that it would be useful for parents of young children and preschool teachers to have a better understanding of the skills and knowledge children need to have in order to have a successful transition to kindergarten. Session attendees provided feedback to the Hartford Public Schools to finalize a colorful and easy-to-read brochure entitled "Preparing for Kindergarten" for parents that explains the school district's developmental expectations for incoming kindergarten students. It was also found that parents would benefit from information about how they could help their children develop

these desired skills. Participants suggested multiple ways to publicize and distribute the brochure to those who would benefit from this information.

Another common theme identified throughout all of the forums was the importance of getting families to register their children for kindergarten or submit lottery applications in the spring so that the school district, elementary schools, and teachers could all plan for their arrival. All kindergarten teachers agreed that a major complicating factor in the kindergarten transition process is that so many families do not register their children for school on time or apply for magnet schools. Participants made a number of suggestions to increase the number of families who complete registrations on time and pursue other options, including:

- Require all community-based preschool programs to arrange for an HPS/ Magnet kindergarten registrations or orientations on-site.
- Offer registration and fairs at other community-based locations during more convenient hours.

- Encourage all community-based preschool programs to adopt the approach used by the Salvation Army preschool program, which resulted in 100% on-time registration for kindergarten.
- Provide more information to preschool and kindergarten teachers and administrators about the registration process.
- Publicize registration and magnet/choice lotteries and their importance in a major PR blitz throughout the City.
- Communicate with parents earlier about the registration status of their children.
- Continue to simplify the registration process and coordinate the lottery process, particularly all of the school choice options.

It was noted that changing the culture of any group is a difficult, often lengthy process, particularly when significant changes are executed. Therefore, it might take several years before families understand the importance of registering for kindergarten early and exercising their school choice rights, but participants believed these steps would help promote this desired change in behavior.

For schools to offer an open house for incoming kindergarten students and their families before the start of school, students already must be assigned to a school and a specific teacher. However, to be assigned to a school and teacher, a child must be enrolled. Until more parents register their children on time, it will be difficult to create widespread opportunities for children and their families to visit their actual kindergarten teacher and classroom before the beginning of the school year.

Preschool and kindergarten teachers appreciated the opportunity to talk with each other and learn more about the work they are doing through the community forums. They indicated that they would enjoy future opportunities to discuss issues with their early childhood and kindergarten colleagues through shared professional development and networking. The Office for Young Children is a well-situated entity to organize and host these sessions throughout the City.

A stack of colorful wooden blocks with letters and numbers. The blocks are in various colors including orange, yellow, pink, blue, green, and purple. Some visible letters include L, N, T, P, A, S, H, D, G, M, F, and numbers like 2 and 3.

Early Childhood Facility Construction and Renovations

Many of Hartford's early childhood programs operate in substandard facilities or classrooms. Programs that are located in older facilities are often challenged with health and safety issues such as lead paint, deteriorating flooring, poor ventilation or air quality, outdated playgrounds and unsafe play equipment or bathrooms. In addition, the manner in which a building or classroom is designed can significantly influence the quality of the program. Bathrooms adjacent to classrooms, telephones installed in classrooms, counters at child height level, windows offering natural light, sinks located in classrooms, sufficient storage and meeting spaces- all make a difference in morale, efficiency and quality.

The demand for more facilities conducive to operating quality early childhood programs has been voiced by numerous Hartford providers particularly because so many Hartford children are denied access because of limited capacity. The Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority (CHEFA) in conjunction with the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) provide opportunities for interested municipalities and early childhood providers to apply for tax-exempt loan funds to construct or renovate programs in order to expand capacity. To be eligible, the loan recipient must be a recipient of a State Department of Education School Readiness grant or a DSS Child Day Care program contract. DSS provides a debt service commitment of 75% or more for municipal applicants and 80% or more for all other eligible applicants.

Hartford has benefited from four awarded CHEFA funded construction projects for new early childhood facilities:

- Mount Olive Child Development Center
- Catholic Charities Institute for the Hispanic Family
- Community Renewal Team's Locust Street Early Learning Center
- Women's League Child Development Center

In March 2007, the Office for Young Children and the City of Hartford received a competitive Capital Improvements and Technology Grant of \$230,091 from the State Department of Education to oversee renovations to four of its school readiness funded programs:

- Salvation Army: (\$72,134) Window & flooring replacements
- Our Piece of the Pie: (\$64,809) Security & monitoring equipment, computer network wiring, digital voice/data communication system, playground equipment & resurfacing.
- Women's League: (\$53,948) Roof repairs & maintenance, upgraded heating & ventilation system.
- Hartford Neighborhood Centers: (\$39,200) Playground equipment & installation.

"CHEFA funding has made it possible for Catholic Charities to support and provide assistance to families, seniors, children, and youth in need, including intergenerational programming, and to increase our early childhood program capacity from 34 to 60 children within a vibrant family center environment. The impact of our beautiful new facility can not be understated. The physical space has a tremendous positive effect on the children, staff and families, and sends the message that our work is important and our families are valued."

*Rose Alma Senatore
Catholic Charities*



Early Learning Centers Consolidation

Prior to the establishment of the Office for Young Children, a broad continuum of fragmented public and community-based early childhood programs existed throughout the City operating with minimum coordination. In accordance with Hartford's Blueprint for Young Children, the Office for Young Children was charged with the consolidation of a variety of existing city government and school services for young children. Over the past two years, the Office for Young Children consolidated the administrative functions of the Health & Human Services Day Care Program under its structure in order to improve quality, efficiency and effectiveness.

The consolidation of the City's Day Care Program, now known as the OFYC Early Learning Centers, celebrates its second year of operation under the auspices of the Office for Young Children this July 2009. It is timely to identify and highlight the benefits achieved. Information was collected from interviews and discussions with Early Learning Center staff and a review of fiscal records. The following five areas reflect the highest rated improvements implemented:

- Increased skill and expertise of the personnel employed in the Early Learning Centers,

- Increased and more focused professional development opportunities provided,
- More effective fiscal management practices,
- Establishment of an environment that values staff achievements at all levels and cultivates early childhood leaders to sustain quality services, and
- Strengthened supervision/evaluation practices and greater program reform supports are readily available.

Early Learning Center staff uniformly reported that the administrative supervision and evaluation support now offered has significantly improved the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the services offered. The new approach implemented is described as supportive and consistent but authoritative when necessary.

Early Learning Center staff also reported that consistent, clear supervision/evaluation practices and expectations have held personnel more accountable for their own actions. Senior Teachers and those designated as in charge when Senior Teachers are not present, are now empowered to assume supervisory roles thereby further enhancing classroom operations. Also, having a highly regarded educational

leader as a supervisor with an early childhood background has strengthened the quality of the program, saving dollars and streamlining disciplinary actions when necessary. Staff reported they no longer waste time justifying why specific actions should be taken because the administrator is well-versed in educational reform and early childhood best practices.

Another improvement reported was the transition from total centralized fiscal management to greater site-based management. This change afforded leadership opportunities to individual centers resulting in Senior Teachers feeling more in control of center decisions and operations. By managing center budgets, Senior Teachers have discovered innovative ways to save dollars and coordinate with one another to reduce expenditures.

Personnel now working on behalf of the OFYC Early Learning Centers are far more professional, dedicated and enthusiastic about their responsibilities ensuring only the best services are provided. In turn, the OFYC has made professional development opportunities available not only for senior level staff but to all staff classifications. Staff credentials have increased and many not otherwise recognized

for their talents are now recruited for leadership roles in assisting the OFYC develop a coordinated citywide early childhood system.

Staff attendance concerns are immediately addressed thereby saving precious dollars previously allocated for substitutes. Staff now understands the significance of their role in creating a quality program, changing the future of many young children and producing impressive outcomes.

With regard to the future, the impressive benefits achieved within a short period of time form the foundation of a premier early childhood infrastructure capable of helping the City become a place where children successfully enter and stay in school, develop quality friendships and relationships, graduate, and ultimately secure meaningful, well-paying jobs.



Family Support Center Hubs and Resources



In 2006, the Mayor's Office for Young Children established and convened the first Neighborhood Family Support Task Force in the City of Hartford in order to:

- Analyze existing Hartford family support systems (Head Start Neighborhood Centers, Brighter Futures Family Centers and Family Resource Centers),
- Develop a strategic framework or action plan that efficiently and effectively combines these fragmented systems into one unified and comprehensive citywide network, and
- Provide ongoing advice and counsel to the Mayor's Office for Young Children with regard to its implementation of the coordinated Family Support System.

Based upon a review of existing Hartford Family Support Programs, task force members have called for major systemic changes with regard to how family support services are delivered in Hartford. In essence, existing Family Support Programs typically operate in isolation, attempting to provide excellent services but despite their impressive efforts, conditions do not improve fast enough nor are they of sufficient scope or scale. Simply said, in isolation these entities do not have the wherewithal to prevent children from failing or dropping out of in school, entering the criminal justice system, or becoming victims of violence. Furthermore, without supportive resources many parents lack adequate

parenting skills, literacy levels, or job readiness abilities necessary to find and hold meaningful positions in the workforce in order to become self-sufficient.

This collective sense of urgency has become the catalyst behind the task force's recommendations to the Cabinet for Young Children. The underlying assumption identified is that the core services needed by Hartford families currently exist in the individual programs, but in order to be effective, must be strengthened, expanded and integrated into one cohesive network that shares a common vision, philosophy, and set of results with a unified structure for organizational efficiency. Therefore, task force members have agreed to:

- Establish a common set of beliefs to which all members of the Family Support Network subscribe.
- Adhere to one set of underlying principles that guide the delivery of services to families.
- Focus on areas of activities and results in which all members are engaged rather than on specific services that individual providers offer.
- Accept a designated role and function within the overall Family Support Network structure that advances the broad goal of delivering more equitably distributed services throughout the city.
- Support an 18-month rollout of an operational plan that creates Family Support Network hubs conveniently located to serve families living in each of Hartford's neighborhoods.

Although each family support model provides similar core services, significant differences exist among them. This negates the endorsement of a single model. To accentuate the similarities rather than the differences, the Family Support Task Force has decided to concentrate on developing a network that allows all three models to continue operating under their current configurations while also consolidating and building upon each other's strengths that meet the continuum of needs families have for support and resources in their own neighborhoods.

In order to work effectively, representatives of the three existing family support models agreed it was necessary to clearly identify and define a set of parameters to which the models could subscribe to and be held accountable. These five broad areas of agreement involve a common set of beliefs, guiding principles, focus areas and results, an organizational structure, and an operational plan.





Child Developmental and Family Screening Initiatives

Early identification of young children with developmental risks, delays or disabilities is critical to effective interventions and positive, preventative outcomes. The Connecticut Birth to Three Program incorporates **Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)** as a mechanism to enable parents to become much more involved in their children's development, identify children in need of further evaluation as early as possible, and monitor development on an ongoing basis since problems can arise at varying moments of development.

The Office for Young Children shares this belief and has sponsored ASQ training to Family Support Workers and Early Childhood providers. From this effort, more children are identified as needing evaluations and/or services and parents have gained insight on their children's developmental progress.

The **Pre-K Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)** is developmentally appropriate for four-year-old children to identify children who may be at risk for reading failure. Specifically, the instrument guides instruction for teachers by highlighting areas of need for individual children. The literacy tasks are intentionally designed to reflect the activities that children typically encounter in preschool.

In addition, the first Building Block of Hartford's Blueprint for Young Children entitled Newborn Screening and Home Visiting for Families, calls for the screening of newborns and their families to identify babies living in high-risk environments. The screening instruments used consider red-flag indicators such as single heads of households with little if any informal supports, stress levels, unstable housing arrangements, substance abuse, incarcerations, history of violence or abuse, emotional problems such as depression, prescription drug dependency, nutritional concerns, etc.,. Home visiting supports are offered by a range of Hartford-based programs.

Scientifically Research-Based: Curriculum Initiatives & Trainings

Blueprint for Early Literacy:

Blueprint for Early Literacy is based on National Reading Panel and Early Reading First recommendations, and is designed to meet state and national standards for reading, writing, and oral language development. These skills are taught in the context of 10 related, sequential themes. At the heart of each theme are award-winning children's books, carefully chosen to introduce children to the delight of reading.

The Office for Young Children has collaborated with two Hartford preschool programs; Kinsella School for the Performing Arts and Little Angels Early Learning Center to pilot implementation of the Blueprint for Early Literacy. Site visits were made to Boston Public Schools and Head Start programs implementing the curriculum and intensive training and coaching has been offered to ensure effective use.

InvestiGators Club Pre-Kindergarten Learning System:

The OFYC has provided intensive training and coaching in conjunction with the Hartford Public Schools, to 16 schools comprised of 25 classrooms. *The InvestiGator Club Pre-kindergarten Learning System* is a comprehensive, fully integrated curriculum complete with all the literature, components, and teacher support necessary. The program builds upon children's natural curiosity about the world and their place in it. "Purposeful Inquiry," the heart of the curriculum, awakens the scientist and the explorer in every child. Children learn to use their senses, ask questions, and find answers in a supportive, print-rich environment.

Opening the World of Learning (OWL):

Opening the World of Learning is a comprehensive curriculum that covers all domains of early learning. The content of each unit is built around a carefully crafted daily routine within an activity-center day. Themes, skills, and concepts are developed through quality children's fiction and nonfiction trade books. The consistent format and features in every unit makes it easy for teachers to use and children to learn. Several Hartford Catholic Charities sites have been awarded an Early Reading First Grant to implement this curriculum. Other Hartford programs were presented an overview and brief training of the curriculum sponsored by the OFYC.

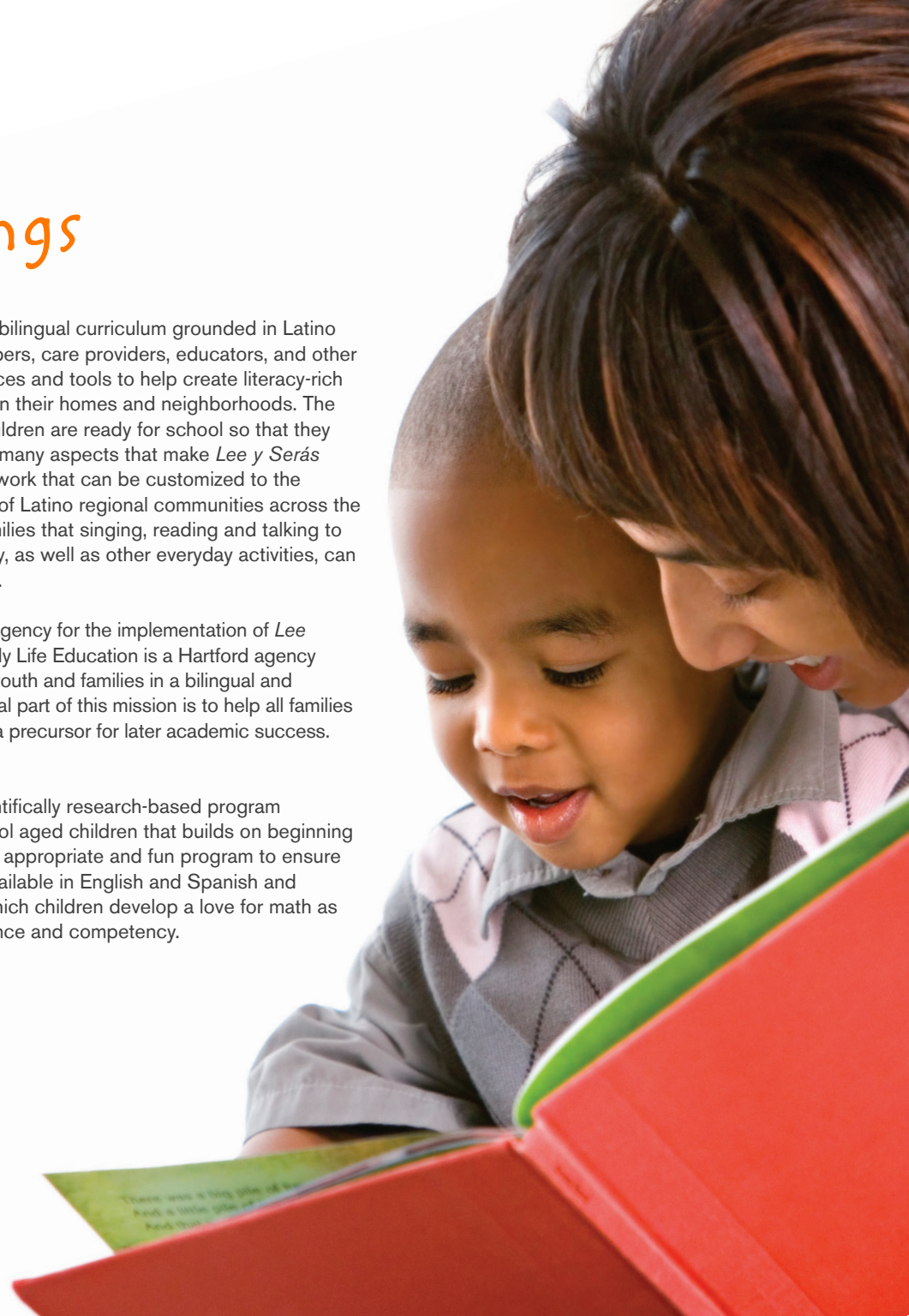
Lee y Serás:

Lee y Serás is a research-based bilingual curriculum grounded in Latino culture that provides family members, care providers, educators, and other community members with resources and tools to help create literacy-rich environments for Latino children in their homes and neighborhoods. The aim is to ensure that all Latino children are ready for school so that they can get ahead for life. One of the many aspects that make *Lee y Serás* unique is that it provides a framework that can be customized to the cultural and demographic needs of Latino regional communities across the country. *Lee y Serás* reminds families that singing, reading and talking to children often and throughout day, as well as other everyday activities, can establish a foundation for literacy.

Family Life Education is the lead agency for the implementation of *Lee y Serás* in the Hartford area. Family Life Education is a Hartford agency dedicated to educating children, youth and families in a bilingual and multicultural community. An integral part of this mission is to help all families foster early childhood literacy, as a precursor for later academic success.

Big Math for Little Kids:

Big Math for Little Kids is a scientifically research-based program specifically designed for preschool aged children that builds on beginning skills to create a developmentally appropriate and fun program to ensure math success. The program is available in English and Spanish and includes engaging activities in which children develop a love for math as they increase their skills, confidence and competency.





Scientifically Research-Based: Assessment Initiatives

CT Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF):

The Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework produced by the State Department of Education, is a curriculum-embedded tool for assessing 3 and 4-year-old children in their preschool classrooms. It was developed to be a companion to the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework (1999) and articulates comprehensive performance standards or learning outcomes. These curriculum and assessment frameworks provide a system for using standards in both planning curriculum and assessing children's progress. They enable teachers to plan and implement curriculum that addresses specific learning standards and to observe and assess children's progress in achieving these standards. This system focuses curriculum planning on standards, or learning outcomes, rather than primarily on activities. All Hartford preschool programs utilize the Preschool Curriculum Framework as the basis of curriculum implementation.

Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS):

The ECERS is designed to assess the quality of preschool classroom environments. This standardized instrument, used commonly in research studies, measures interactions between staff, children and parents, as well as child interactions with various materials and activities included in the classroom environment.

Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO):

The ELLCO helps build better literacy programs by assessing the quality of both the classroom environment and teachers' practices. With ELLCO, educators reliably gather the essential data needed for professional development and program improvement that lead to better literacy outcomes for young children. Several years ago, all Hartford school readiness classrooms were ELLCO assessed however, due to the state's new directives requiring ECERS to be completed on classrooms this initiative remains in only some classrooms.

Program Administration Scale (PAS):

The PAS was developed to exclusively measure the quality of administrative practices of early childhood programs. The instrument is commonly used to identify areas of strength and weakness and to promote quality practices. The Salvation Army has used this instrument and gained significant insight from its findings.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS):

The CLASS is a system for observing and assessing the quality of interactions between teachers and students in early childhood classrooms. The instrument was designed to measure instructional and social interactions proven to contribute to students' academic achievements and social competencies.

Progress Report on Young Children in Hartford

In accordance with Hartford's Blueprint, the Office for Young Children is responsible for producing a biannual profile or **Progress Report on Young Children in Hartford**. The purpose of the Report is to: **Inform and educate all residents about the importance of the early years of life as well as the factors that affect children's development and learning.** The experiences children have between the ages of birth to eight make a big difference in their futures. The early years are a time when children grow and develop quickly. What does or does not happen for them in this short time period, determines if they will grow up to be healthy, happy adults and learn the things every child needs to know to succeed in life.

A child's brain does most of its growing by the time the child is three years old. By five years of age, parents and family members- with the help of others in the community, should have worked together to make sure every child is ready and able to do well in school. By the end of third grade or eight years of age, children must know how to read or they risk falling far behind and failing academically.

Define the status of young Hartford children, age's birth through eight years. The Office for Young Children asked hundreds of adults and some children what is most important for them to know about Hartford's early childhood services or needs. The Progress Report includes the items or indicators identified by those who attended these community forums. Their responses are grouped into four main categories:

Early Care & Education: Before a child enters kindergarten, there are things that parents and others in the community can do to make sure every child is able to play well with other children, has the chance to learn important things, and is ready and eager to succeed in school. Parents who want their child to attend a high quality early childhood program must have access to affordable, nearby centers.

Family Support & Safety: Every parent and family with a young child deserves the supports they need to make sure their home is safe and that there are services available to help them raise happy, healthy and successful children. Family Support Centers/Hubs must be available in every neighborhood.

Child Health & Development: From birth, parents work hard to make sure their children are healthy. A child's health can affect a family in many ways such as the amount of money it has, or how much time family members have to join in other activities. When children do not feel well, chances are, they do not want to participate in activities that will help their development or learning. Families with young children must have health services easily available to them on a regular basis- not just when a child is sick- to make sure they stay healthy.

Children as Effective Learners: Once children enter school, how well they do in the early grades determines how well they grow and learn throughout their lives. For children to do well, the Hartford Public Schools must offer high quality instruction in safe, clean school buildings that meets the unique needs and interests of each student. In addition, parents must become involved with their child's education by talking to teachers, meeting with administrators when needed, and attending school activities, especially parent conferences.

Forecast the direction the City and its residents must take to improve the lives of young children and their families: In addition to brief descriptions and charts, indicators included color-coded arrows to illustrate trends or the expected status of how the indicator will progress over a three-year period. These arrows tell readers whether things are getting better, worse or staying the same.

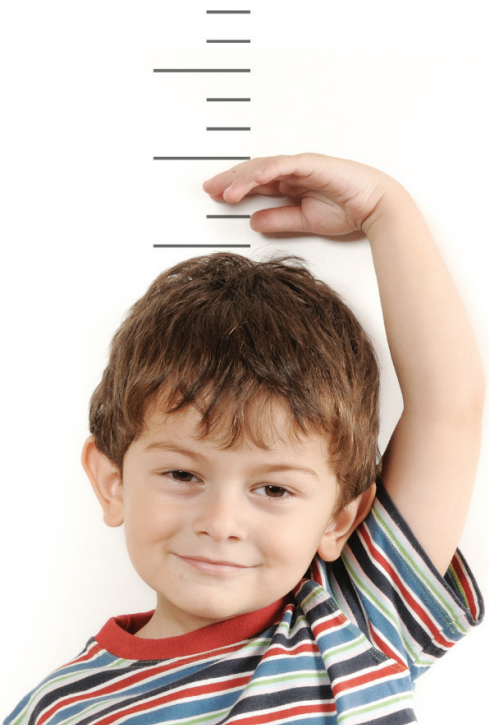
This report also helps Hartford understand what other information is needed about our children and what we should share with community and public officials to make Hartford a city where young children are healthy, safe and find success in school.

The Progress Report on Young Children provided Hartford residents and service providers a much needed, user-friendly resource to determine how well the City of Hartford is preparing and supporting its young children for school success. The report highlights the progress made and the challenges that lie ahead, recognizes the value of sharing this information broadly with the Hartford community, and underscores the importance of making policy decisions affecting children and families based upon solid information and research.

*Richard A. Sussman
Director, Brighter Futures Initiative
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving*

Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) fits nicely into our citywide vision of technology enabled transformation, fueled by data driven decision-making. It provides a central platform that makes it possible for organizations to understand and manage the performance of point of service staff, individual agencies, and the community of services as a whole. ETO is in direct correlation to our system process improvement.

Eric L. Jackson
Chief Information Officer
Metro Hartford Information Services



Coordinated Data Collection and Accountability Systems

The OFYC Progress Report on Young Children in Hartford provided critical information and insight about how young children in Hartford and their families are progressing. Through this exercise, the Office realized that the data necessary to support Hartford's identified priorities was often difficult to access, conflicting, or not available. Therefore, the Office for Young Children is currently leading a collaboration, pursuant to the Mayor's developed goal to provide quality education for workforce development and lifetime personal growth, with other city departments (HOYS & HHS) to develop a citywide data collection system that integrates existing fragmented and duplicative systems in order to effectively measure progress and guide future planning.

Based on a successful pilot implementation of **Social Solutions ETO (Efforts to Outcomes) Software** by the Office for Youth Services and a review of other nationally recognized software programs, members of the Goal 2 Leadership Team comprised of HHS, OFYC, & HOYS, agreed that ETO offered the most potential and was best suited to respond to the City's interdepartmental data collection needs. ETO Software reportedly has multiple uses but it is primarily designed to be used as a performance management tool to strengthen accountability and measure success. Specifically, it is designed to translate "good intent" into measurable change by relating staff efforts including those at the service delivery level to measurable outcomes.

Results Based Accountability (RBA) is "a disciplined way of thinking and taking action that communities can use to improve the lives of children, families and the community as a whole". It is also used to improve services of programs or agencies and is easily adaptable to each community's individual needs.

The Office for Young Children currently uses RBA in order to accept responsibility for the impact of its work on collectively agreed upon outcomes for young children, their families and the City of Hartford. Effective implementation of this approach demands utilizing data to understand past and current trends and to measure the progress of citywide strategies that improve the wellness of young children, families and the community. **In essence, at a citywide level, it is possible to identify which interventions work and which do not- and then**

allocate or cut funds accordingly. The marriage between ETO Software and RBA offers the Office for Young Children and Goal 2 member departments the mechanisms to achieve quality of life results and strengthen accountability.

The Office for Young Children is currently a recipient of a competitive grant awarded by the State Department of Education, Graustein Memorial Fund and the Early Childhood Education Cabinet with matching funds from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to implement ETO Software and RBA. Funds from these grants were used for OFYC, M&B, HPS, HOYS, HHS staff to attend a four-day RBA Training Institute and enabled one-on-one departmental RBA support from Charter Oak Consulting. Within the past few months, the OFYC has:

- Secured RBA training linked with the ETO system work and has begun to integrate outcomes into the Blueprint.
- Convened community forums to secure additional community input and recommendations regarding identified data indicators.
- Coordinated and collaborated with other city data collection systems.

In addition, the OFYC Early Childhood Provider Network Members and Family Support Task Force members have participated in RBA training provided by Charter Oak Consulting. Early childhood providers have identified individual program level measures reflective of the unique characteristics of their programs as well as those that will enable the OFYC population level indicators that were further refined as, percentage of Hartford:

- children entering kindergarten with a formal early childhood experience
- 3rd graders @ goal or above on the CMT
- Husky children receiving well-child health care visits based on the recommended periodicity schedule
- pregnant women receiving adequate prenatal care
- parents receiving approved formal parenting education
- substantiated cases of abuse, neglect & accidents.

Emergency Preparedness & Evacuation Procedures

While planning the first Family Fair at City Hall, the OFYC became aware of the importance of emergency preparedness and evacuation due to the size of the anticipated crowd, the recent realities of 9-11, and the risk of injury to young children in a building that no longer met codes. This awareness was prompted by the City's Director of Emergency Management who encouraged an organized evacuation plan should it become necessary as well as a pre-established defined area to regroup after the emergency.

Based on this experience, the OFYC decided to query early childhood providers and learned that there was no coordinated plan in place, that providers were not prepared for a disaster should one occur, and that the City's and State's designated first responders knew very little of Hartford's early childhood programs. From that moment on, the OFYC has assumed leadership for developing an organized emergency preparedness and evacuation plan for its citywide providers, most of which were not known to the police or fire departments.

First, the OFYC ordered multiple copies of "Is Child Care Ready?" developed by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies for each early childhood program located in the City of Hartford. Then workshops were convened to build an awareness of the need for a coordinated Early Childhood Evacuation and Emergency Preparedness Plan to ensure programs are prepared to respond to disasters.

The OFYC distributed a Disaster Preparedness Checklist in which each program was able to identify tasks and materials that were in place as well as those that needed attention. Completed Checklists were collected and analyzed by the OFYC from which a citywide matrix was developed to highlight the areas in greatest need.

But the most immediate need was to coordinate evacuation sites. In many situations, programs identified offsite evacuation sites without informing the receiving site. The most commonly identified sites by community-based programs were schools, unbeknownst to principals. In the event of a disaster that required evacuation, this would have resulted in children and staff, being denied access if the facility was in "lock-down", or turned

away because of insufficient capacity. As a result, programs were required to secure a signed Emergency Evacuation Agreement with the receiving facility administrator and forward a copy to the OFYC.

Approximately ten intensive trainings and workshops were dedicated to this topic including tabletop exercises coordinated with the Homeland Security Training Coordinator from Capital Region Council of Governments. Another included a panel presentation comprised of representatives from the Connecticut Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, Emergency Planning & Preparedness Division; the Capital Region Council of Governments; the State Department of Public Health, Drinking Water Division; the City of Hartford Fire Department; the City's Police Department; the Hartford Public Schools; and the City's Emergency Management.

In addition, the Office for Young Children participated on an Ad Hoc Child Care Subcommittee of the Connecticut Child Safety and Crisis Response Committee to identify and address the safety, crisis response and emergency preparedness issues affecting children and childcare providers, after school programs, summer camps and other settings. The goal of the Subcommittee is to "completely address and provide appropriately developed materials and information for Connecticut child care providers by delivery in a more formal identified and funded program implementation." The Office for Young Children recognizes the importance of high quality learning experiences for all of Hartford's young children, from birth and beyond, and their families. Coordinated professional development workshops provide opportunities for Hartford's early childhood and family support professionals to come together in order to improve their knowledge and skills, and ensure children are prepared for school and life-long achievements.



"The Office for Young Children has been a pioneer in promoting awareness and action to educate childcare providers on how they can respond during emergencies to protect those youngsters in their care. The child care providers are in much better position to protect those for whom they care on a daily basis."

*Thomas F. Gavaghan
Dept of Emergency Management & Homeland Security*

Early Childhood Conference

On June 6, 2008, the Office for Young Children held its first citywide Early Childhood Conference at the Hilton Hotel for 500 attendees and presenters. Aside from offering participants thirty-three two-hour workshops to choose from, the Conference also served as a forum for the Office and the Mayor to publicly thank all of Hartford's early childhood workforce for the relentless hard work put forth each day to help the City's children eagerly enter school ready to learn, develop new friendships and feel good about themselves.

The Office for Young Children purposely selected workshop topics and presenters to address the needs and interests of administrators, teachers, consultants, and family support workers. Moreover, to ensure participants were able to apply their newly acquired skills, the Office purchased free instructional materials for participants to use the next day with the children and families in their classrooms or groups.

Workshop topics included Young Children without Homes, Infant/Toddler Sign Language, The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Mad Science Workshops, Yoga for Young Children, CT Infant/Toddler Frameworks, Autism, Teaching History & Geography to Young Children, Supervision, Lead Poisoning and Kindergarten Expectations. Some speakers were recruited as far away as California, Virginia and Maryland but most were state experts in their topics.

The Conference marked a threshold in the morale of the City's early childhood workforce in that for the first time, they truly felt valued and appreciated, whether they were teachers of infants, center directors or paraprofessionals- for their contributions on behalf of Hartford children and families. The feedback collected from evaluations unanimously called for the Conference to be repeated each year.

"Top notch from start to finish! This conference and its well organized workshops was hands on and applicable to our everyday work with children and families. The food and location were elegant, and provided us the opportunity to network with other professionals."

Hyland Early Learning Center Staff





Office for Young Children Staff

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Kennelly School

Paul Dworkin, M.D.
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CT Children's Medical Center

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Lena Rodriguez
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